



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to Ambassador Reeve and Ambassador Tagliavini on Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 13, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Georgia Head of Mission Reeve and Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations Tagliavini to the Permanent Council. We appreciate their reports and remain optimistic that democratic political consolidation in Georgia will succeed. We support the Government and people of Georgia in their efforts on many fronts. It is evident from these reports today and from our own experience that the energy for reform and development in Georgia remains high.

Nevertheless, it is difficult indeed to make the transition from the turmoil, change and excitement of revolution to the everyday details and challenges of government. It seems clear from the reports today that the government, parliament, civil society, and media are attempting to adjust. As they do so, it is critical that human rights, media freedom, due process, and the other standards and norms of the human dimension remain the touchstones for success.

Mr. Chairman, turning to South Ossetia, the United States supports Georgia's territorial integrity and fully supports efforts to resolve the South Ossetia conflict exclusively through peaceful means. We deplore the September 20th mortar attack in Tskhinvali that resulted in the injury of a number of civilians, including a small child. We commend the work of the OSCE Field Office in investigating the incident and call on all parties in possession of relevant information to share it fully and immediately with the OSCE.

Mr. Chairman, the United States also deplores the parade displaying heavy offensive military equipment in the Zone of Conflict as part of South Ossetia's so-called independence celebration earlier the same day. Bringing these weapons into the Zone of Conflict constituted a clear violation of the cease-fire agreement that should have been prevented by parties in a position to do so. We also note with concern the actions of Georgian side to use Georgian peacekeeping forces to block the Transcaucasus Highway in violation of existing agreements regarding the Joint Peacekeeping Force.

The United States believes the time has come to work together with new energy to achieve, through peaceful negotiations, an agreement on an autonomous status for South Ossetia within a unified Georgia. Actions from any side that violate existing agreements

only exacerbate tensions, undermine trust, and complicate our mutual efforts to promote a settlement to the conflict. We call on all parties to refrain from such actions and to work toward creation of relationships of mutual confidence. We believe that the OSCE's needs assessment study, agreed recently within the JCC, will help identify projects that will build trust between the sides and improve the lives of the people of the region. The U.S. is providing support for this study.

We urge the Russian Federation to help avoid further tensions and to encourage a direct dialogue, with the support of the international community, between Tskhinvali and Tbilisi aimed at resolution of this long-standing conflict.

Mr. Chairman, turning to Abkhazia, the United States remembers that it was four years ago that nine colleagues from the UNOMIG mission died when their helicopter was shot down. They lost their lives in the cause of peace. In their memory, we call on the sides to redouble their efforts to resolve the conflict in Abkhazia.

Like the United Nations, we also are not satisfied with the progress made to date on resolving the conflict. As a member of the UN Group of Friends of the Secretary General, we urge the sides to make progress within the UN framework in areas such as human rights, civilian policing, and the return of IDPs. In particular, we hope that a joint declaration on security guarantees will be agreed shortly between the sides. We also urge the sides, with the assistance of the Group of Friends, to initiate economic cooperation projects that improve conditions for the people of the region and build momentum for the resolution of Abkhazia's status within a unified Georgia.

Thank you.